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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a historical perspective on the implementation of educational reform by the Thatcher government in England. Since 1979, and particularly since the Education Reform Act of 1988, the state educational system in England has undergone massive reform in the form of a national curriculum, increased school-based management, and the reduction of local education agencies' powers. The rationale was to place control of education in the hands of consumers (parents and employers) and to use market forces to improve school effectiveness. This analysis of educational reform and curriculum implementation is grouped around three themes--culture, control, and curriculum. It is argued that the reforms have been inspired by a desire to reverse the course of history. Three conclusions are made regarding culture, control, and curriculum. First, radical reform of one part of the education system will have little effect if the old social, economic, political, and educational hierarchies continue in an unreformed state. Second, the great concentration of central-government control makes education vulnerable to violent policy reversals should another party come to power. Third, there is no guarantee that the central government possesses educational wisdom. Positive outcomes have been achieved in specifying objectives, ensuring progression within and between schools, and improving knowledge and standards in neglected areas. However, three problems remain: (1) the continuing interference by government ministers in curricular details; (2) the exemption of independent schools from curriculum and testing requirements; and (3) the lack of fit between a traditional, subject-based, centrally controlled national curriculum and a consumer-led approach to education. (LMI)

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Educational Reform and Curriculum Implementation in England: an historical perspective

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Introduction

This chapter provides an historical perspective on the educational reform and curriculum implementation which has taken place in England since the advent of the first government of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. The word 'historical' is here taken to mean the study of human events with particular reference to the dimension of time. Such study, though principally located in the past and the present, also has implications for the future. England, together with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, constitute the United Kingdom. Although the United Kingdom is one state, governed from Westminster, there are significant cultural differences between its several parts, differences which are reflected in both the formal and informal dimensions of education. The term 'England' in the title, therefore, should be taken as a recognition of these differences, rather than as any attempt to generalize from one part of the country to the whole.

Recent educational reform in England has, to a great extent, been consistent with the widespread changes which have taken place in other 'Western' societies. Indeed in education, as in other policy fields, the radical reforms of Margaret Thatcher have provided a model for governments, both of the right and of the left, of other countries.

Since 1979, and particularly since the Education Reform Act of 1988, there has been a massive reform of the state educational system in England, certainly the most substantial since the Second World War, and possibly the most substantial in English history. A national curriculum of ten subjects has been established, a curriculum which is centrally prescribed and controlled. All children are to be tested at the ages of seven, 11, 14 and 16. Schools now have considerable control over their own budgets: some, indeed, have chosen to opt out of local authority control altogether. Accordingly the powers of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) have been severely reduced. Not only has their relationship to schools been severely weakened, polytechnics (now redesignated as universities) and other colleges of higher education have been removed from their aegis. The largest and most expensive local authority, the

EA 026 332

Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), has been simply abolished.

These reforms have been justified in terms of the need to improve individual and national economic performance. The basic interpretation of the process by those who have carried it out is that in the interests of promoting national efficiency it has been necessary to wrest the control of education from the producers - teachers and LEAs - and to place it in the hands of the consumers - parents and employers. The application of market forces - for example open enrolment which allows a school to recruit pupils up to the limit of its physical capacity, and the publication of league tables of examination results - will, it is argued, confirm the quality of, and provide further incentive for, good schools. Those which are identified as under-achieving will be forced by parental pressure either to improve or to wither away.

It is not difficult, however, to point out certain inconsistencies and flaws which underlie these arguments. The market principle has not been applied to the curriculum or to testing. All pupils in state schools will follow a national curriculum which, ultimately, has been prescribed by a politician, the Secretary of State for Education. The very use of the word 'national' may also be questioned. Independent schools do not have to follow the national curriculum, nor are their pupils subject to national testing.

Thus the market may operate in respect of curricula in independent schools, but not in state schools. As to the operation of a market in choice of schools, although there are some 'assisted places' at independent schools for the children of poorer parents, essentially access to such schools is restricted to those who can pay the fees. The operation of a market between state schools means that where a popular school is oversubscribed, ultimately the choice will rest with the school (the producer) rather than with the parent (the consumer).

This analysis of educational reform and curriculum implementation is grouped around three themes: culture, control and curriculum. The approach is a broad one, for the reforms which have taken place have been inspired by a broad purpose: nothing less than to reverse the course of history.

Culture

English culture is deeply rooted in a complex and contradictory history. The traditional rural hierarchies of the medieval period - monarchy, aristocracy and church - and their attendant values, have been overlaid, but not yet overwhelmed, by the industrial, urban and professional revolutions of more modern times. In the nineteenth century Britain became the greatest

and most confident imperial and financial power the world had ever seen. In the twentieth century, that confidence was to be shattered by the loss of empire and by relative economic decline. Though on the winning side in the Second World War, in peacetime Britain was defeated on the economic battlefield by (amongst others) two of her former adversaries - Germany and Japan. British governments and businesses increasingly attributed such defeats not to their own shortcomings, but to the failure of the educational system.

There have been two broad interpretations of the nature of that perceived failure. One interpretation would be to point to the survival of medieval hierarchies and values. It could well be argued that the educational system reflects the strength of English conservatism. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the only universities in England for some 600 years, still enjoy a unique social and intellectual position - with some 50 per cent of their undergraduate students recruited from independent schools.

The most prestigious secondary schools are also medieval foundations, for example those of Winchester and Eton. Access to such schools continues to be monopolized by the sons of the wealthy. These boys' independent schools, the so-called 'public schools', have provided a model for secondary education across the centuries. The grammar school tradition which they exemplify, with its elite connotations and Classical, rural and religious values, continued to provide the model of secondary education in England until very recent times.

In 1965, for example, eight per cent of secondary age pupils were in independent schools, 26 per cent in grammar schools, a mere five per cent in technical and selective central schools, and 49 per cent in modern schools. (Prais and Wagner, 1985, 56, figs for England and Wales)

Such criticism would not deny the achievements of pupils in independent and grammar schools. Attainment levels at age 18 of pupils who have concentrated for two years on three General Certificate of Education Advanced level subjects are comparable or superior to those of pupils anywhere in the world. But at what cost have such achievements been bought? Concentration upon the success of the few at the expense of the many has made schooling in England essentially unpopular. Since the introduction of compulsory schooling in 1880 the majority of pupils in English schools have chosen to leave as soon as possible - currently at age 16. Secondary schools have not provided a purposeful education for all, according to abilities and needs, but rather have acted as a selection mechanism for those who would proceed to higher education or to the professions.

In consequence, in spite of the fact that some 90 per cent of state secondary school pupils now attend comprehensive schools,

such schools have considerable difficulty in producing an ethos appropriate to the world of the 1990s. The continued existence of the independent schools, the survival of grammar schools in some areas, coupled with the recent introduction of opted-out schools, and the absence of any strong technical or vocational tradition at secondary level, combine to create considerable problems.

Such an analysis was confirmed by the substantial research into the comparative standards of schooling in England and Germany, and their bearing upon economic performance, undertaken by Prais and Wagner. They showed that some 60 per cent of the German labour force obtained vocational qualifications (compared with 30 per cent in Britain) with a particular superiority in the area of mathematics. They concluded that the strength of the German economy depended in part upon the amount of pre-vocational instruction provided in German schools and that this had 'a definite commercial and industrial (and not merely 'craft') emphasis' (Prais and Wagner, 1985, 68)

A more detailed analysis of curriculum will be provided in a later section in this chapter. At this point it is important to note that not only with respect to the curriculum, but also more generally, English schooling has been weak in its provision for the pupils of average and below average ability, as opposed to those who are academically gifted. Too often such pupils have been presented with a watered-down version of the grammar school curriculum, or diverted into studies which have had little validity and less status. Prais and Wagner concluded that 'The contrast between the growth of an intermediate stream of schooling in Germany - with its explicit educational objectives and syllabus - and its submergence in England, provides an overriding clue to many educational and social differences between these countries.' (Prais and Wagner, 1985, 70)

A second interpretation of the weaknesses of English education focused not upon the faults of traditional educational institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge and the independent schools, but rather upon the failure of new foundations to reproduce their many virtues. The writers of the Black Papers, the first of which appeared in 1969, condemned the perceived progressivism of the Plowden Report and of the primary school, the laxity and low standards of the secondary comprehensive school, and the permissiveness of the new universities and polytechnics. According to this analysis the English educational system, rather than acting as an agent of investment in individual and national well-being and wealth, had become a destructive force, characterized by consumption. It provided a haven for neo-Marxists and others of the left to encourage amongst children and students a culture of envy and enervation, of indulgence and inaction.

In October 1976, in the wake of further economic difficulties consequent upon the oil crisis, the Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, signalled his disquiet in a speech delivered at Ruskin College, Oxford. Though careful to distance himself from the Black Paper writers, the tone of his speech indicated that the heady days of hippy culture, of the Beatles and flower power, were over. Instead he called for greater accountability in three areas. The first was a halt to ever-increasing educational expenditure; the second a need to raise educational standards and to equip pupils to 'do a job of work'. The third was to pay greater attention to the needs of employers and to the wishes of parents.

Such an analysis was music to the ears of Margaret Thatcher, Secretary of State for Education and Science, 1970-4, and Prime Minister, 1979-90. Her aim was nothing less than to purge English culture of what she saw as its many weaknesses, weaknesses which had proliferated with the growth of state monopolies and state socialism. In seeking to match the competitive cultures and economies of such states as Japan and Singapore, she looked back to the nineteenth century, and drew upon the so-called 'Victorian values' of enterprise, thrift and personal responsibility. The public services would be privatized, at both national and local levels; the power of those latter-day, over-mighty subjects, the trade union leaders, like Arthur Scargill, who had brought down the Heath government in 1974, would be broken. Members of the old professions - lawyers, doctors and university teachers - would be deprived of their privileges and brought to account. Those ministers within her governments who blanched at this attempt to reverse the course of recent history, 'the wets', many of them from the traditional ruling families, were simply removed from office. The grocer's daughter from Grantham was equally adept at disposing of trade union barons or Conservative grandees.

Although until 1986 educational reform was of a piecemeal nature, the advent of a new Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, with his decisive style and comprehensive approach, led to the Education Reform Act of 1988. The government believed that the brave new world which it envisaged, the world of small businesses, of enterprise, of competition, of individuality, was being hindered by members of the educational establishment. The thrust of the legislation, therefore, was to weaken the power of the providers, and to increase that of the consumers. Such an approach was consistent with the general tenor of Thatcherite reform. Thus the abolition of the Greater London Council was followed by the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority; the sale of council houses by the opting out of schools. Institutions of higher education were required to bid for students; the tenure of university teachers was abolished. In education, as in other areas of social policy, there was a move towards controlled competitiveness.

It is not clear whether educational policies were significant factors in the four successive Conservative election victories of 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992. These victories, however, suggest that within England at least, the broad thrust of Margaret Thatcher's policies and those of her successor, John Major, have commanded more support than those of their opponents. One obvious feature of the Conservative period has been the decline in power of the trade union movement, a decline which has contributed to the defeats of the Labour Party with which it has always been inextricably intertwined. Such decline has meant that, in contrast to countries like Australia, the trade unions have had little or no influence on recent educational reform.

What then is the future of English culture, and how will such future affect the educational reforms implemented so far?

In 1993, at the time of writing, neither the traditional institutions and values, nor the enterprise culture appears to be very successful. Some of the ancient institutions are in disarray. The concept of the royal family has been severely tarnished by marital problems which have been so prominently featured in the media. The Anglican Church, of which the monarch is the Supreme Governor, has also been weakened by these developments, and further divided by the decision to admit women priests.

Grave doubts have also arisen about the efficacy of the Thatcherite revolution. After a decade of enterprise culture, the United Kingdom, in common with many other 'Western' societies, has experienced deep recession. Though inflation has declined, so too has productivity. Unemployment stalks the land, so that an ever-increasing percentage of public spending must be diverted into social security payments. During 1993 there were indications of both a modest upturn in output and of a decline in unemployment, but the recovery is fragile and may be reversed by increases in taxation to be implemented in 1994 and 1995.

Such difficulties have called into question, once more, the nature of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland remains a permanent problem. Nationalism and separatism have found a stronger voice in both Scotland and Wales, which have given their support to their own nationalist parties or to the Labour Party of Neil Kinnock and John Smith. On the international scene the country appears to be a half-hearted member of both the European Community and of the Commonwealth, while still trying to sustain a 'special relationship' with the United States of America.

Strong elements of competition have certainly been introduced into the educational system. Universities now compete against each other for funds for teaching and research. Schools compete against each other for pupils. Whether such competition will

raise the overall educational standards and promote a classless society (John Major's declared aim), or simply allow those who are already successful, powerful and wealthy - the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the independent schools, state schools in affluent areas - to become even more successful, powerful and wealthy, remains to be seen.

Margaret Thatcher exemplified the Nonconformist enterprise culture of mid-nineteenth century England. The rhetoric of Conservative educational reform was consistent with the promotion of such a culture. But the Nonconformist enterprise culture did not triumph in the nineteenth century in England, nor indeed in the twentieth. The open aristocracy of England, with its traditional rural and classical values, outmanoeuvred the entrepreneurs. In the boys' public schools, the sons of manufacturers learned to despise their origins and to acquire the speech, manners and prejudices of the traditional landowning and professional classes. The educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s were largely devised and implemented by ministers who had themselves attended independent, and not state schools. Although Margaret Thatcher, herself, had attended a state school, the architects of educational reform - ministers like Keith Joseph and Kenneth Baker - were the products of independent schools. These schools remained the ideal, the jewel in the crown, and in a direct sense were untouched by the reform process. LEAs might be deprived of their schools and colleges, and teachers of their pay negotiating rights; state primary schools would be pilloried for their progressiveness, state comprehensive secondary schools would be castigated for their confusions, but the independent schools would remain independent. And Margaret Hilda Roberts, the product of Kesteven and Grantham Girls' Grammar School, who studied chemistry at Oxford and worked as a research chemist before turning to the law, ended up in the House of Lords as Lady Thatcher

Control

One of the great paradoxes of the recent educational reforms in England is that, although they have been justified in terms of market forces and of freedom, their most obvious product has been a massive increase in central control. The 1988 Act, for example, has given the Secretary of State some 415 new powers. (Lawton, 1989, 43) Other groups which might claim an increase in powers are school governing bodies, headteachers and parents. The losers have been the LEAs and teachers. The situation of pupils in respect of control remains unclear.

How should this change in control be interpreted?

The first point to note is that this assumption of authority by government was as much the cause, as the result of legislation. It signalled that in educational terms, as in other areas of

life, the politics of partnership had been replaced by the politics of confrontation, the agenda of consensus by that of radical reform. Substantial changes in any area of human existence may either be produced by negotiation and consensus, or by imposition. The Education Act of 1944 was preceded by a lengthy round of consultations with interested parties, including the several Christian denominations. There was no such process prior to the Act of 1988. A minimal period of eight weeks was originally allowed, which nevertheless drew more than 20,000 responses, half of them on the proposed national curriculum. (Haviland, 1988)

This lack of consultation stemmed not only from a change in style but also from the nature of the proposed legislation. Education acts which are designed principally to increase the amount of education may be approved by a wide range of interests. On the other hand the stated intention of the 1988 Act was not so much to improve the quantity of education but, as Callaghan had argued some 12 years earlier, to improve its quality without increasing its resources. Since the government believed that such improvements depended essentially upon weakening the power of the existing educational establishment, the actual process of legislation, as well as its outcome, necessarily involved an increase in central control. LEAs were not likely to welcome their loss of control over a range of institutions from schools to polytechnics, especially when the largest and most prestigious, the Inner London Education Authority, was scheduled for abolition. Teachers, who in 1987 were deprived of their pay negotiating machinery which had existed for well over 60 years, were not likely to welcome further loss of control, over such matters as the curriculum. Academics were hardly likely to approve of the removal of tenure.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to believe that central government was assuming quite unprecedented powers in respect of education. Rather was it returning to some of the control mechanisms which existed at the time of British economic supremacy in the mid-nineteenth century.

Two points may be noted here. The first is that the establishment of a central authority in English education (1839), preceded the introduction of the first local educational authorities, the School Boards (1870), by some 30 years. During that period of time schools were owned and controlled, as they had been for centuries, by voluntary bodies, corporations and private individuals. The role of central government was to supply financial assistance to those schools which required it, provided that such schools submitted to inspection and, from 1862, to a national curriculum and national assessment. Under the system known as 'Payment by Results', central government grants to schools depended largely upon the performance of pupils in annual examinations in the the three Rs - reading, writing and arithmetic. These

examinations were not carried out by teachers, not even by former teachers, but by an august body of graduates, principally from Oxford and Cambridge, many of them clerics, who had no other connection with the elementary school world, or with its inhabitants - Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI).

At this time working-class parents paid the full or partial cost of their children's schooling. Not until 1891 was elementary education made generally free.

Conservative governments have always been wary of local government control over education. In 1868 Disraeli's government, indeed, proposed to establish a much stronger central authority headed by a Secretary of State. Two years later a Liberal government under Gladstone established the first local educational authorities, the single-purpose School Boards, but even these were intended to provide a third-rate product. At that time there was no expectation, either among Conservatives or Liberals, that the mass of schooling would pass under local government control. Nor was there any thought that such bodies would take responsibility for secondary, adult or higher education. A natural hierarchy was assumed. Parents who exercised proper responsibility for their children would send them to independent schools, and would pay the full cost of their education. Those who could not, or would not, do so, might send their offspring to the state-aided, voluntary schools, of which there were 8,000 in England and Wales in 1870. The great majority of these, some 6,000, were supplied and controlled by the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, a body established in 1811 under the presidency of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The role of the School Boards was to 'fill up the gaps' in respect of elementary schools, principally in localities which were too poor to make proper provision on their own account.

By 1900, however, many of the schools provided by the Boards, which could rely on local rates as well as finance from central government, were decidedly of first-rate quality. Conservative governments believed that the natural order of things was being turned upside down. With some justification the prelates of the Church of England argued that the schools of secular local boards were being favoured over those of the Established Church. Accordingly in 1902 the Conservative government, led by Balfour, abolished the ad hoc School Boards and handed their powers over to multi-purpose authorities. In 1902, as in 1988, the London School Board was at the centre of the controversy: on the grounds of its perceived radicalism, excessive expenditure and pre-occupation with matters outside its proper sphere.

Compulsory schooling was established in England in 1880. It was part of a broad movement for, as Pavla Miller has commented, 'in the last third of the nineteenth century, systems of mass

compulsory schooling were established in most countries of the Western world'. (Miller, 1989, 123) One hundred years later, in England, as in other 'Western' countries, central government believed that the educational system, its administrators and teachers, had outgrown their role, and had created a state within a state, with its own priorities and values. Margaret Thatcher was Secretary of State for Education from 1970 to 1974. During that time, in spite of her own doubts and those of many of her party, comprehensive secondary school reorganization proceeded apace - the system seemed to have a mind and a momentum of its own. Her subsequent attempts to alter this state of affairs aroused considerable hostility and led her own alma mater, the University of Oxford, to refuse to grant her the customary Prime Ministerial accolade of an honorary degree. The 1988 Act was designed to ensure that the Education Establishment - LEAs, teachers' unions and academics - would never again dictate educational policy to central government.

Thus the apparent contradiction between a substantial increase in central government power in education and the ideal of a consumer-driven enterprise culture becomes less contradictory when viewed from an historical perspective. It could be argued that, in the twentieth century, and certainly since 1944, the distinctive feature of English education, in comparison with many other countries of a similar size and nature, has been the absence of central government control: in terms of ideology, ownership and personnel. According to this analysis central government has re-assumed, rather than assumed, several powers under the recent legislation, and the removal of schools and institutions of further and higher education from local government control may, indeed, provide such schools and institutions (notwithstanding current financial restraints) with a greater freedom both to manage their own affairs and to respond to the wishes of consumers.

One feature of this re-assumption of control has been to show how ill-equipped, in terms of personnel, the government has been to implement its reforms. The Department of Education and Science (since 1992 the Department For Education) has not had teams of curriculum experts in its employ. The several quangos and working parties established to put flesh on to the bare bones of legislation have necessarily included large numbers of professional educators, educators who have produced schemes for curriculum and assessment which the government has often seen as a deliberate attempt to pervert the course of its reforms, and to win back control of the system. There is now a widespread belief that many key appointments to such bodies are being made, and will continue to be made, from amongst the ranks of 'party apparatchiks'. (Graham, 1993, 134)

The historic controllers of the school educational system, the traditional eyes and ears of the Department, Her Majesty's Inspectors, have always enjoyed a certain independence from

central government. For example, the HMI model of a national curriculum, both before and after the 1988 Act, differed considerably from that held by other Department of Education and Science employees, and by ministers. (Chitty, 1988) As Duncan Graham, chair and chief executive of the National Curriculum Council from 1988 to 1991, has recently revealed:

> Council meetings and major committees were usually attended by a deputy secretary and Eric Bolton, the then Senior Chief HMI, who did not see himself as part of the Civil Service and was fighting his own battle to regain control for HMI. (Graham, 1993, 17)

Such independence came to an end in 1992 when the numbers of HMI were drastically reduced and the post of chief inspector became a part-time appointment. In future, inspections of schools would be carried out by private teams which would include a strong representation of the 'consumer' interest.

Curriculum

The curriculum of schools and other educational institutions may be viewed in several ways: for example as a selection of knowledge and values from the culture; as a battleground for contending pressure groups. How should the national curriculum in England be interpreted?

George Tomkins suggested that there are three broad positions in respect of curriculum: child-centred education which stresses individual development; vocational education which focuses upon the demands of the workplace; subject-based education which favours cultural heritage and traditional hierarchies of knowledge. (Tomkins, 1979)

Since 1976 the child-centred curriculum has found little favour with governments which have believed that the education system as a whole was too self-centred, and insufficiently aware of the real world outside the playground walls or campus gates.

Keith Joseph's concern for the neglected 40 per cent of secondary school pupils who were not preparing for public examinations led him to take a keen interest in vocational education, but the major thrust in this direction came not from the Secretary of State and the Department of Education and Science, but from David Young and the Manpower Services Commission. The Manpower Services Commission (from 1988 the Training Commission) was established in 1973 as an offshoot of the Department of Employment. The principle of a separate agency for vocational training was nothing new in English history. For example in 1853, following the success of the Great Exhibition, a Science and Art Department was established

at Kensington, and pursued distinct policies from those of Whitehall until its demise in 1899.

Two major developments sponsored by the Manpower Services Commission were the school-based Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative for 14 to 16 year-olds, which was 'directed towards new technology, business studies and teaching about particular, local industries', (Ainley, 1988, 122) and the Youth Training Scheme, also begun in 1983, which provided a year's training for all unemployed 16- and 17-year-old school leavers. Under this latter scheme it was proposed that three-quarters of the time would be spent in work experience, the other quarter in off-the-job training or further education. Although David Young had strong backing from Margaret Thatcher 'the only man who brings me solutions and not problems' (Ainley, 1988, 123) there were widespread doubts about the somewhat haphazard way in which funds for the Technical and Vocational Initiative were being applied. As to the Youth Training Schemes, which had replaced a previous Youth Opportunities Programme, although, in the short term, such strategies substantially reduced the numbers of young unemployed, the long-term effects of these schemes were broadly questioned, both by employers' and trade union organizations, and by the trainees themselves. In 1989 the Confederation of British Industry adopted a radical report on vocational education and training which posed serious questions as to government policy in this area and declared unequivocally that 'the practice of employing 16-18 year-olds without training leading to nationally recognized qualifications must stop'. (Maclure, 1991, 4)

In spite of these, and other vocational initiatives it seems clear that the curriculum reform promoted by Conservative governments since 1979 and embodied in the national curriculum as set out under the Education Reform Act may be categorized, in terms of Tomkins' analysis, as one which favours cultural heritage and traditional hierarchies of knowledge.

The curriculum is defined in terms of subjects: three core and seven foundation. Its traditional nature is indicated by the uncanny resemblance to the list set down under the Secondary School Regulations of 1904 - the curriculum of the publicly-funded grammar schools established under the Education Act of 1902.

1904	1988
English	English
Mathematics	Mathematics
Science	Science
Foreign Language	Foreign Language
History	History
Geography	Geography
Physical Exercise	Physical Education

Drawing
Manual Work/Housewifery

Art
Technology
Music

Music, though not in the original curriculum of 1904, was added subsequently. In 1904 Latin would have been one of the foreign languages taught. In the 1988 curriculum modern languages were to be introduced from age 11. This list of subjects was not meant to comprise the whole curriculum. In response to a wide range of criticisms the government acknowledged that time should also be found for religious instruction and for other interests and activities.

Why was this curriculum chosen? Several answers may be adduced. Such a curriculum would preserve the traditional hierarchies of schools and knowledge, a grammar-school curriculum for all - at both primary and secondary levels. All children would have a sound training in the basics of mathematics, English and science; all children would be equipped for the technological age and yet would also have access to a broad range of cultural subjects. Early specialization would be avoided. Children would not be able to give up study of those subjects which they found difficult or boring.

Such a curriculum would also be easy to prescribe, to control, to test and to resource. For a government seeking to produce nation-wide test results by which parents might measure the quality of schools, without itself incurring any great increase in educational expenditure, a traditional, subject-based curriculum had many advantages. National programmes of study and schemes of assessment, to be followed by all children in state schools, could be swiftly established. Most of the teachers were already in place, although in addition to the traditional shortage subjects of mathematics and science, more teachers of modern languages and technology would be required in secondary schools. At primary level teachers would need more training in science and technology. The first programmes of study were introduced in 1989 and the first assessment of seven-year old children in the core subjects of mathematics, English and science took place in 1991.

Though the general principle of a national curriculum commanded widespread support both among professional educators and the public, there was considerable opposition to the actual curriculum as laid down under the 1988 Act. Some of this criticism proceeded from those who would have opposed anything which stemmed from a Conservative government, but many of the government's own supporters were also highly doubtful as the wisdom of the proposed scheme.

Thus those 'long-serving exponents of the application of market forces to educational decision-making', (Maclure, 1988, 163) the economists and political scientists of the Institute of Economic Affairs, argued that:

> The most effective national curriculum is that set by the market, by the consumers of the education service. This will be far more responsive to children's needs and society's demands than any centrally imposed curriculum, no matter how well meant. (Haviland, 1988, 28)

The Confederation of British Industry, the employers' association, gave approval to the principle of a broad-based curriculum for all which would avoid the problems associated with premature specialization, but reaffirmed:

> the concerns expressed by industry and commerce regarding the important need to inform these traditional subjects with cross-curricular themes that relate to life after school and the world of work in particular. The CBI is concerned that the document does not contain any specific reference relating to economic awareness and understanding, or careers education. (Haviland, 1988, 29)

Other critics were even nearer at home. In 1985 Keith Joseph, widely regarded as Margaret Thatcher's ideological adviser, and himself Secretary of State for Education from 1981 to 1986, issued a document entitled Better Schools, which declared that:

> ...it would not in the view of the Government be right for the Secretaries of State's policy for the range and pattern of the five to sixteen curriculum to amount to the determination of national syllabuses for that period...The Government does not propose to introduce legislation affecting the powers of the Secretaries of State in relation to the curriculum. (DES, 1985, 11-12)

During the debates on the 1988 Bill, Joseph, now in the House of Lords, opposed the national curriculum as being:

> still too prescriptive...I have to add that if all the foundation subjects were tested, we would impose too large a testing industry upon our schools and squeeze out some relatively widespread non academic, vocationally geared subjects. (Hansard, 495, 1263-4)

In spite of some modifications both to the national curriculum and to national testing, many of the questions raised in 1988 by the government's own supporters have still not been solved.

There is a widespread belief that too much has been prescribed and too much has to be tested. In 1862, under the Revised Code, the government began with the testing of three subjects and then proceeded to allow schools to add 'specific' or 'class' subjects for grant-earning purposes. In the 1990s the (widely - predicted) difficulties of giving due weight to all 10 national curriculum subjects are now generally apparent. Retreats have already been made, both in respect of curriculum and testing.

For example some foundation (but not core) subjects have been diluted for older pupils so that the national curriculum for all now applies to the five to 14 age range rather than the five to 16 as originally announced. One solution, currently being canvassed, is to increase the length of the school day, but given that teachers already work well in excess of 50 hours per week, with the bulk of that time spent in non-teaching tasks, such a solution poses considerable problems of its own.

Conclusion

Political and economic rivalry are as old as history itself. For centuries 'Western' nations have dominated the world in a political and economic sense, and have enjoyed a disproportionate share of the planet's goods and resources. Such domination is bound to be tested in several ways, and the lessening of the ideological and military challenge posed by the Soviet bloc in eastern Europe has only brought into sharper relief the economic rivalry between the 'Western' nations themselves, and the substantial challenge currently spearheaded by the countries of Asia.

The educational reforms introduced by the Conservative governments led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major have been justified principally, though not exclusively, in terms of enabling the country to reverse its relative economic decline. It is difficult, as yet, to measure the effectiveness of these reforms, particularly in the midst of a global recession, and there is no doubt that there have been substantial modifications to the original schemes for national curriculum and testing. On the other hand the British economy appears to be coming out of recession, albeit from a very low base, while participation in formal education has substantially increased. In the last five years the percentage of pupils continuing in full-time education beyond the age of 16 has leapt from 50 to 70, while some 30 per cent of school leavers now proceed to higher education.

Three further concluding points can be made in respect of culture, control and curriculum.

First, in respect of English culture, the formal education system cannot be divorced from its social, economic and political contexts. Notwithstanding the undoubted capacity of teachers in state schools to transform the lives of individuals, and of groups, it is also undeniable that 'education reflects and transmits the values which are dominant in society and the values which have dominated English life for more than a century have not been those of the enterprise culture.' (Maclure, 1991, 9-10) Radical reform of one part of the education system will have little effect if the old social, economic, political, and <u>educational</u> hierarchies continue in an unreformed state.

Second, the assumption of so much control by central government in education raises two issues. The first is that there is no guarantee that educational wisdom and responsibility rests predominantly with central government. Indeed central government has frequently failed to do its educational duty in the past, not least in respect of the enterprise culture. For example, the 1918 Act established part-time day continuation schools to age 16, the 1944 Act, county colleges to age 18. The failure of Conservative and Labour governments in the post-war periods to implement these reforms is the principal cause of the current deficiencies with regard to vocational education and industrial training in England. The second issue is that now that so much power in education has been concentrated at the centre, there may be violent reversals of policy, should a different government come to power. The Conservative government has sought to weaken (or abolish) LEAs, HMI and university departments of education. A government of a different political persuasion might instead target the power, influence and independence of the independent schools. Education must be a partnership, not a battleground. Now that central government has so much control, it must seek to rebuild a partnership that includes not only parents and employers, but also teachers and other educational professionals and, for the foreseeable future at least, LEAs.

As for the national curriculum, certain benefits are now becoming apparent: in terms of specifying objectives, of ensuring progression within and between schools, of improving knowledge and standards in hitherto frequently-neglected areas, for example science and technology in primary schools. But three problems remain. The first is that of continuing interference by government ministers in curricular details, interference which places enormous strains upon teachers, examiners, textbook publishers, and the children themselves. The second, which is closely related to the themes of culture and control, refers to the meaning of the word 'national'. If a national curriculum and national testing are essential for the economic well-being of the nation, should they not also be applied equally to all parts of the United Kingdom, and to independent schools? Finally, the fundamental contradiction in the educational reform process must be highlighted once again. Is a traditional, subject-based, centrally-controlled national curriculum consistent with a consumer-led approach to education?

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